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Islam, Marxism, and the Vatican

By AVRO MANHATTAN

THE conflict between Marxist philosophy and organized Christianity, which prior to the outbreak of the second World War exerted a considerable influence upon the growth of European political extremism, has during the past few years assumed such an increasingly violent character that now it is regarded as one of the paramount factors most responsible for the sorry state of affairs of the present day. Indeed, since the dawn of peace such a conflict, far from abating, has become an integral part of the diplomatic war now being waged between Soviet Russia and the U.S.A.; the ideological gulf separating these two countries being the manifestation, not only of hostile economic and political systems, but also of existent moral forces rooted in what is, generally speaking, still regarded as Christianity.

Of the three main Christian branches—Orthodoxy, Protestantism, and Catholicism—the last has steadily emerged as the most actively combative. With the Orthodox Church once more subservient to the Russian State, and a spiritually de-centralized Protestantism organizationally incapable of co-ordinated efforts, the Catholic Church has, in fact, emerged as the top exponent of Christianity as a whole, as opposed to Marxism, rightly or wrongly identified by the Catholic Church with Communism in politics, Materialism in philosophy, and Atheism in the religious field.

Between the two world wars, Catholic exertions against this Marxian trinity were mostly confined to Europe, or more precisely to the West. The satellization of the Balkans by Russia, the emergence of Red China, the current Asiatic

political convulsions, the unrest in the Middle and Near East, the subterranean rumblings of an awakening racial consciousness in Africa, now have enlarged the original conflict to such dimensions that the old Catholic Western spiritual battle-line has become not only insufficient but inadequate.

Catholic strategy, therefore, was bound to be modified, indeed transformed, into a kind of spiritual Chinese Wall, to be extended, not only as far as the East, but wherever Marxism was triumphant. As a result, the Catholic Church had to trespass in non-Christian territory—that is to say, in Africa and in Asia. Unlike in the West—where her members enabled her to carry out her policy with powerful religious and associated political backing—here the Catholic Church found herself in an alien field; for not only were there no Catholics, but there were not even Christians in sufficient numbers to ensure her the minimum of support. Hence the necessity of making allies of all who are preoccupied by the same dangers. The latest recruit, surprisingly enough, has proved to be Islam.

The very contemplation of a Christian-Moslem front is epoch-making. To be sure, Moslem-Christian alliances have been made before, but they were invariably of a political or military, never of a religious, nature like the one now in progress, whose character is precisely the reverse of what has taken place throughout the bloody history of Christian-Moslem relations.

Concrete steps have already been taken. The Egyptian Minister to the Vatican has repeatedly discussed in Cairo the possibility of an agreement between the Catholic Church and the Moslem

world for a joint defence of Christianity and Islam against the dangers of Communist Materialism and Atheism. The far-reaching effects of such a move, were it to achieve completion, cannot be fully estimated. A look at the Moslem world would suffice to give an idea of the vast repercussions that a united Catholic-Moslem front would produce simultaneously in the spiritual and geographical fields. They would reverberate across three continents—from the north-west of Africa to the Near, Middle, and Far East, almost to the Pacific Ocean. The prospect of a Catholic-Islamic *entente*, of course, automatically raises some pertinent questions. Were it to become a concrete reality, could the Moslem leaders arouse enthusiasm sufficient for the launching of an ideological Jihad or Holy War against Communism? And admitting they could, would they be able to wage it with the necessary efficiency to reach their objective?

In the past, a Holy War, to be effective, had to (a) have an enemy, (b) be promoted on religious ground, and (c) have a leader. At present the enemy is there, no doubt—the contemporary substitute of Islam's traditional Christian foe, Communism. But would the Marxist credo suffice to provoke an enmity capable of stirring the Moslem world into concerted action? In the Islamic world, a Holy War, even if called ideological hostility, cannot be divorced from religious zeal. And religious zeal at present is no longer what it used to be. The economic problem has become a far more powerful factor. Today the hope of economic security, even when screened by specious political or religious labels, is far more powerful than believers and Agnostics alike care to admit. A Moslem war against Communism could prove this more clearly than anything in the past. For the fact that three-quarters of the Islamic masses live in the most abject poverty, and above all that the Communist promise of economic betterment, even if still somewhat vague, has already allured most of them, is one liable to upset the most elaborate calculations in any ideological or religious war of the future.

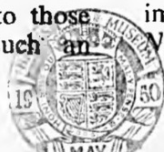
The hope of economic betterment might not be as glamorous as social or spiritual ideals, but it has already proved to be a lever capable of overturning nations. Otherwise how could one explain that at present more than thirty per cent of the human race is under Communist rule, in lands where Christianity, Buddhism, and Islam are still the dominant religions? An Islamic declaration of war against Communism could boomerang with the most tragic results to those who proclaimed it. A Jihad with such an

obviously political nature not only would automatically turn into a political war, but would assuredly generate nefarious political-religious chain-reactions liable to split the Moslem world asunder with more far-reaching consequences than the Holy War proclaimed over thirty years ago.

It was, in fact, the launching of a Holy War to achieve purely political gains that during the first world conflict caused the downfall of the Ottoman Empire, gave the final blow to Moslem unity, and provoked the very abolition of the Caliphate. Had the Sultan of Turkey not mixed politics with his religion, he would have remained the head of the Moslem world, no matter what might have befallen the Ottoman Empire. As Sultan he would still have retained immense power as the head and leader of the Mohammedan faith; just as the Vatican has still a great voice in the council of nations despite the fact that the Roman Empire has long since crumbled into dust.

The abolition of the Caliphate not only spelled an end to the religious unity of Islam, but also disrupted Islam as a Church, besides scattering its political might. Since then, Islam, like Protestantism, although potentially a vast source of power, has become like a body without a head. Its exertions are incoherent, mis-directed, unorganized, and consequently inadequate. Owing to the fact that there is nobody who could proclaim a Holy War with due authority, least of all direct it—also owing to the lack of a genuine religious motive—a Holy War would be practically impossible. The prerequisite of success, now more than ever, has to be exceptional unity of forces, purpose, and goal. Nothing short of this could give Islam the chance of even partially succeeding in its envisaged fight against Communism, a foe possessing all the above qualifications to an unprecedented degree.

Furthermore, a new Jihad inspired by such oblique political goals would become even more pernicious if proclaimed in conjunction with a Christian Church. To substitute the traditional religious foe of Islam, Christendom, by an entirely alien one, Communism, is a miracle which no amount of religious-political zeal will be able to perform practically overnight. Such an attempt, indeed, might release latent hostile religious animus in a great portion of the Moslem world, still deeply rooted in its historical traditions. If religious fanaticism is a force which cannot be lightly invoked—for, once aroused, it is calculated to carry all before it—political fanaticism, or, even worse, the amalgamation of the two, might produce a monster as impossible to control as a genie of the Arabian Nights.



The Arab League, the present lame substitute of the Caliphate and Islam's latest political expression, although a force to be reckoned with, is still too fluid to influence, even partially, the Moslem world. Its call, in 1947, to a kind of local Holy War to fight Israel was a complete failure, thus proving not only that it lacked the power to rally to its side the Muslims as a whole but also that it was unable even to influence the far more limited Arab world, in spite of its appeal to the political and religious feelings of its peoples.

Notwithstanding its weakness, however, Islam is still a potentially formidable religious-political unit. Whoever succeeds in exerting even a partial influence upon it will wield a power capable of provoking political and social repercussions in many strategically important parts of the world, from Spanish and French Morocco to Egypt, Persia, Pakistan, and Indonesia; indeed, to within the very Soviet Union itself, at present housing twenty-five million Moslems. The Vatican is well aware of this; hence its recent moves in certain Moslem quarters, particularly with the Arab League—so far the most articulate product of a reawakening Islam, which even at its present stage is, in some Catholic circles, reckoned useful in the forging of the machinery by which to set in motion the Catholic-Moslem scheme. How far the plan will materialize is difficult to say. The significance of the Vatican's newest actions, however, should not escape the student of Catholic affairs. The contemplated Islamic-Catholic *entente* is the surest indication that Catholic strategy is being broadened to a degree not envisaged even a few years ago.

Its recent hints at reunion with the various Protestant Churches, when seen in conjunction with its approaches to Islam, prove beyond any doubt that the Vatican has definitely adopted a strategy to be carried out simultaneously in two well distinct fields: in the political through its secular alliance with the U.S.A. and the nations of the Atlantic Pact; in the religious through a possible understanding with the Protestant Churches and non-Christian religious systems, in a supreme effort to create an irresistible anti-Materialistic, anti-Atheistic front through the concrete synchronization of spiritual and physical forces by the completion of political and religious alliances.

The inclusion of Islam in this vast scheme, while certainly full of potentialities, is still too much in its early stages to yield immediate results. But the most symptomatic meaning of the Islamic-Catholic move is not merely that it is an outstanding concrete demonstration of two hostile religious systems trying to draw close

together as their fear of Atheism grows in geographical and ideological dimensions, but also that the Vatican is trying to make itself recognized by influential Christians and non-Christians alike as the foremost champion of religious liberty.

A cursory glance at the past and recent Catholic exertions should easily dispel such an extraordinary belief. And yet the growing tacit acceptance by some Protestants, and even Moslems, of Catholic leadership in political matters is creating the erroneous credence that the Catholic Church is the defender of whoever nurses religious beliefs of any kind—indeed, that she has suddenly turned into the paladin of tolerance and freedom.

But what is even more important is the fact that the Vatican, by trying to increase its stature in assuming the mantle of defender of religion, is successfully creating a belief in its unique moral leadership. The real aim of all this is not difficult to discern. It is a determined attempt to see that the motto *Salus extra ecclesia non est*—no salvation exists outside the Church—which so far has been confined to the religious sphere, be accepted also in the political. So that by towering above all, as an unchallenged religious-political power, it might be enabled to mould world politics, not so much to destroy Communism as to expand its Catholic imperium.

But if the downfall of a political tyranny should mean the consolidation of a spiritual one, then indeed that freedom, to defend which so many non-Catholics are rallying under the banners of the Catholic Church, would be endangered in the future perhaps by a more ruthless foe than the one by which it is imperilled today.

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